

A Closer Look

By Ernest Kreiling

HOLLYWOOD — After several seasons of relative obscurity television comedy is riding high again this year. Seven of the public's 10 most popular programs, according to the A. C. Nielsen Co., are comedy in one form or another. At the close of last year's TV season in May only Hazel and Andy Griffith among the comedies ranked with the 10 most popular programs.

The re-emergence of comedies as public favorites can't be entirely attributed to the flood of new comedy programs. Only two of the seven, Beverly Hillbillies and Lucille Ball are new, although they do rank first and second in size of audience.

RED SKELTON, Candid Camera, Danny Thomas, Griffith, and Dick Van Dyke

all ranked in the elite ten, have been around before but are enjoying new popularity this year. Last April Dick Van Dyke was scheduled for oblivion because it hadn't lived up to Proctor and Gamble's expectations. Determined action and persuasive argument on the part of Producer Carl Reiner secured a reprieve for another season, and it's now ranking number 10, a spot I think it's deserved long before this. The three non-comedies enjoying top 10 popularity are Ben Casey, Bonanza and Dr. Kildare. THROUGH THE summer some Hollywood oracles were

predicting that Beverly Hillbillies would prove to be the sleeper of the year, which it has indeed become. In many ways it seems the most unlikely program to become a hit. It leads from an illogical premise that taxes our credulity and affords most viewers little opportunity for personal identification. The secret ingredient seems to be the same as Sgt. Bilko's, a type of underdog who frees himself from the system that imprisons him. Here a semi-primitive family of hill people romp blithely along, winning little victories for us all over a highly stratified society that

offers more restraints than freedoms. PART OF THE fun derives from our own superiority in knowing the rules which the Clampett family doesn't. But the highest pleasures come from our identifying with them in ignoring the rules with impunity. It provides a suppressive laughter which in its simplest form says, he tried to subdue me and I put one over on him. The same elements are present in many of the wild antics of Lucille Ball and in Morey Amsterdam's verbal victories over Richard Deacon, the bald

headed producer on the Dick Van Dyke program. Freedom from some of the restrictions of a highly organized society is a welcome relief. And comedy that provides just that appears to be what the American public wants from television this year. Republican Youth Club Sets Meeting The Teen-Age Republican Club of Torrance will meet tomorrow, 7 p.m., at the home of Pam Milligan, 1551 Post Ave. All teen-agers wishing to attend may contact Jerry Roberts, president, FA 8-0075.

TV CANDIDS

by
Terrence O'Flaherty

Television has become the Pied Piper of the youngsters of America. If your children are following the Piper it is important that you know what kind of tunes the Piper is playing.

Many months ago Newton Minow, the chairman of the FCC, which regulates broadcasting in this country, made some comments about children's programming that TV critics had been making for years—that is, there aren't enough imaginative programs designed for the children of America.

This season—prompted by a mixture of benevolence and fear—the major networks came up with a fat batch of new moppet programs, some of which promise to be entertaining as well as stimulating. Because of the average American's fear of his children—almost from their birth—he will probably face some opposition in getting the kids away from the private eyes to watch a program of worth.

Nevertheless, guidance is the primary function of a parent and if you can't take the trouble to introduce the youngsters to something worth while, and make them watch, you might as well sign over everything to them right now and go on relief.

The commercial stations offer a wide variety of moppet operas on Saturday which range in worth from zero to 100. Among the latter are two new programs which were prompted by the Minow comments: NBC's "Exploring" and CBS's "Reading Room"—both of which are subject to substitution if sports events overlap.

NBC's "exploring" is generally excellent and capitalizes on the child's great gift of curiosity. It lasts an hour and is divided into sections like a magazine, covering legends, music, math, science and history. CBS's "Reading Room" is a 25-minute show designed to stimulate young minds and lead them to books.

ABC's new entry is a 25-minute program titled "Discovery '62" which serves a greater need than a single Saturday show by appearing every weekday. It is a good show—any program that eliminated part of the Dick Clark Dance Time can't be all bad!

However, Minow's request called for children's shows in more fashionable viewing hours and the Westinghouse network has complied with "Magic Magic," a series of monthly hour-long specials for young people shown at family viewing time.

There are good things for youngsters on television. It is up to the parent to seek them out and encourage their children to watch. If there aren't any worthwhile programs on the air at any given time, the youngsters should not be allowed to watch. Send them outside to steal hubcaps or whatever kids do these days.

There is one awesome danger to parents in all this lofty programming for the youngsters: The little devils are going to be so smart by the time they're 10, we won't be able to live with them.

There has been a lot of talk about "saturation" on television—the fatal error of appearing too often or overstaying the welcome once you're on. It has happened to almost as many stars as it has to weekend house guests.

For the past decade, Danny Kaye has been the major example of a performer who has followed a policy of appearing infrequently on television and anywhere else for that matter.

There has been evidence that lack of material might have been the reason behind Kaye's policy. But recently CBS announced the comedian will do 40 one-hour shows during the season starting in the fall of next year.

With a typical horse-before-the-vehicle process, CBS has the star and now they're trying to decide what kind of a show to put him in. Kaye's wife, Sylvia Fine, will not be working with him as in the past. Whatever caused him to leap from one to 40 shows a year is still a mystery and he isn't talking. Maybe he wants to die on stage.



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